

Summer 2013

## SFA Gardens Newsletter, Summer 2013

SFA Gardens, Stephen F. Austin State University

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# SFA Gardens *NEWS*

## Notes from the Director

By David Creech

From my perch in the Tucker House, the state of the SFA Gardens seems bright. Here at the Pineywoods Native Plant Center, my second floor office window frames the construction project of the Ina Brundrett Conservation Education Center building perfectly. It's an eclectic gathering of contractors, subcontractors, SFA Physical Plant personnel, electricians, plumbers, carpenters, IT employees, roofers, and others of professions quite holy. For us who office at the Tucker house, it's simply astounding. In fact, we still can't believe in just a few months there will be a ribbon cutting to reveal a brand new environmental education world. Everything will change, except our mission. That will stay the same: to connect our youngest citizens to the natural world and the joy and value of Pineywoods gardening. With 42 acres, the audience waiting in our forest, and now a rain or shine house of learning, nature and fun, who wouldn't be excited?

### **Pineywoods Native Plant Center**

Greg Grant has just returned from medical leave

for a hip replacement. In his absence, we hired Spence Simmons as a temporary employee. Spence graduated May 2013 from SFA with a Bachelor of Science in Horticulture. It's never easy to be cast adrift in a multi-chore world of gar-

the tree henge also has been extended. Our goal is to tie this feature into the trail network. At the north end of the PNPC, the native fruit garden is getting a facelift. In late fall, we will add a significant number of advanced selections of both musca-



**Construction of the new Conservation Education Center is well underway at the Pineywoods Native Plant Center**

dening, and the PNPC is no different. Spence is handling it with ease. In his short time here, the nursery and greenhouse production areas are clean, organized and packed with healthy, vigorous plants. The landscape has been weeded, watered and tended and the trail network is in tip-top shape. Still a work in progress, the boardwalk that runs through the *Hymenocallis* colony to

dine grapes and blueberries to the already extensive, existing collections. We receive most selections via the breeding work of Dr. Stephen Stringer, USDA, Poplarville, Miss. Greg has returned and while it'll be awhile before he's running laps around the PNPC, we couldn't be more eager to have him back at the garden.

## Notes, cont.

### Mast Arboretum

I've concluded that Dawn wears many hats. Her charge in life is busy. There's cutting and seed propagation to be done. There's the chore of acquisitioning plants and keeping track of maps and databases. There's routine and not so routine greenhouse and nursery work. Of course, there are all kinds of exciting new plants to add to the landscape, which means there's maintenance to follow – water, weeding, fertilizing and pruning. As part of her work, she manages a small army of volunteers and student assistants, as well as an endless river of visitors. There's also garden talks, event preparations and two major plant sales each year. Well, you might conclude, hey, that's enough! Well, it's not. Dawn has added a new hat: managing the fruit and vegetable garden on the south side of the Arboretum. It's a big resource and a work in progress. From a horticultural point of view, there's every reason to embrace this new garden as an important part of the SFA Gardens mission. With more than two acres, a productive LaNana Creek bottomland soil, full sun and irrigation, what's more to ask? The fruit plantings include figs, pomegranates, citrus and blueberries. The vegetable growing areas - raised beds and field plantings - have amazing potential. Dawn stayed busy this spring and summer with the All-American Selection Vegetable trials. Harvest and data collections led to an informal "farmer's market" at the head house and traffic was enough to get me to thinking that this is a viable funding source for our vegetable gardening habits.

### Ruby M. Mize Azalea Garden.

There's nothing like a walk in the Ruby M. Mize Azalea Garden to lift anyone's spirits. I finally realized this garden has smoothly transitioned from teenager to adult without me even knowing it happened. This garden has arrived. We can boast a clean trail network and good signage leading students and visitors through a diverse range of healthy azaleas, camellias and Japanese maples. Add in some amazing rare and unusual trees scattered here and there, and our collections of *Buxus*, *Magnolia*, *Hydrangea* and *Cephalotaxus*, and we now have a classy garden for all seasons. Much of the credit for the fine presentation must go to Duke Pittman and crew. They've been masters of the garden for some time now. Weeds are more or less gone with no more endless seas of Virginia creeper and other weedy thugs making our lives miserable. Watering is now routine. With most of the collection a decade old, plants have settled into being beautiful, tough and durable.

### Gayla Mize Garden

Work at the Gayla Mize Garden reminds me of the activity at the Ruby M. Mize Azalea Garden during the first few years, only in spades. That was almost fifteen years ago! Only a sliver of University Drive separates the two gardens, but there are differences. I'm convinced the Gayla Mize Garden actually enjoys a slightly better soil. Perhaps it's the Burrows Creek donation of silt and sand drifts during floods that has left such a prime planting spot. Another difference in this garden is our drip irrigation system - a new experience for eve-

ryone. Drip irrigation here is no walk in the park. There are 3500 emitters, one at each plant, and miles of ¾ inch black poly pipe. With about half the garden in the second year, and the other half planted this past winter, this is the risky time in any garden's history. Most of our attention has been focused on managing water, including fixing leaks, finding clogged emitters, repositioning emitters and pulling base of plant weeds. Duke leads the charge and will be the first to tell you about the headaches. There are annoying gangs of armadillos who thrive on digging in moist soil. They damage root systems and move drippers away from the plant. That spells instant death for a young plant. Then there's other wildlife who choose to gnaw on our poly pipe - easy to spot by the geysers in the garden. It's fairly quick to patch, but happens more than Duke likes. The good news is the well is flowing and as anticipated, the sediment issue is lessening. Furthermore, the nearby pavilion also has new cedar beams as rafters and is ready for the next step. The chrysanthemum trial at the entrance bed of the garden is now firmly established. The goal this fall is to fill the last few empty spaces in this eight-acre garden. The focus here is on deciduous azaleas. We have many new varieties and selections acquired and growing in our nursery to plant in the near future. In addition, we've built an impressive hydrangea collection and we're planning to showcase them this fall. Finally, the boardwalk collection of 40 *Crinum* varieties will receive an additional 50 varieties for display. Our mantra remains as always, let's keep planting!

## What's an Azalea-lover to do?

By Barb Stump

Yes, it is summer. It is very hot and likely to be for several more months. So, what is an azalea-lover to do with this "down-time?" As with any kind of gardening, there are plenty of chores.

The main chores from now until October are very minimal pruning, mulching if needed and keeping plants moist but never water-logged. Be careful about pruning, since the tips of the branches already have tiny flower buds on them. You will want to only cut out dead branches. If you mulched in the spring your garden may be fine, but the heat breaks down mulch fast. If you need more, add another three or four inches, but in a ring around the plant, not right up to the trunk. Watering this time of year is very important, because azaleas have shallow roots near the soil surface and can dry out easily. If you have soaker hoses or drip irrigation, it is easier to make sure the plants get water right to them. Overhead or in-ground spray irrigation is also good and best done when the sun is not beating down on the plants. Watering in full sun can literally sunburn the leaves. Set timer clocks to start before sunrise. If you don't like where you have your azaleas planted, think about a new location and build a new bed. Transplant them in the fall when temperatures are cooler, under 75 degrees.

The good news for this time of year is that you can now dream about new azalea colors or hybrids

to add to your garden. Fall is the absolute best time for planting azaleas. The cool temperatures and winter rains encourage the plants to get their shallow roots settled in. Survey your yards and locate spots where new azaleas might fit in well. Think of colors you might



The lovely 'Bloom-a-Thon Red' azalea

want to add to balance the existing colors in your landscape. For example, if you have lots of big pale lavender 'George Lindley Taber' azaleas, you might want to accent with white 'Mrs. G. G. Gerbing' azaleas. Those are very successful here (and heat-tolerant) or take a chance on a whole new color and size of azalea. Local nurseries carry the newest azaleas, like the Blooms' Again, Bloom-a-Thon, and the newest Encore Azaleas. It's more fun to view these flowers in person, but you can also look these names up on the Web. Most know, in our Ruby M. Mize Azalea Garden, that we weren't shy about color clashes. With the lavender

azaleas, adding a strong purple or even a strong pink would be fine. You could be conservative and add 'Red Formosa' for the purple and a 'Salmon Solomon' for the pink; both would bloom around the same time. If you want to extend the bloom, add Kurumes such as 'Hinodegiri' (very strong carmine purple) or 'Coral Bells' (pink) for an early bloom, and Robin Hills for a later bloom. Similar colors also are available in the newest offerings, and in varying heights and widths. For inspiration look at the Azalea Society of America Web pages

([www.azaleas.org](http://www.azaleas.org)) for basic information and photos of various azaleas. You can send me a note through the SFA Gardens e-mail ([sfagardens@sfasu.edu](mailto:sfagardens@sfasu.edu)) and I'll provide the next meeting date of the Texas Chapter of the ASA. Led

by SFA Gardens volunteers Sherrie Randall and Peg Kern, the chapter is busy propagating my favorite 30 azaleas for our 2015 ASA national convention to be held in Nacogdoches. This is another great way to learn about the varieties of azaleas. This year will include three sources for new azaleas: local nurseries, the Fabulous Fall Festival plant sale October 5, and a fall Tree and Azalea Sale, organized by the Nacogdoches Convention and Visitors Bureau and Keep Nacogdoches Beautiful. Information will be posted on the SFA Gardens page and sent out to all SFA Gardens members and volunteers.



## Confessions of a Gen-X Farmer

By Dawn Stover

I grew up next to a small truck farm. My farming neighbors happened to be my grandparents. I spent many afternoons after school and many days in the summer with those two. Summertime meant picking cucumbers with Grandma and Grandpa. They grew potatoes, tomatoes, okra, green beans, cantaloupe and summer squash. They also grew field corn for the cows and sweet corn and purple hull peas for the family. Grandma enjoyed growing bell peppers too, but they were never my favorite. As time passed, I grew into a typical teenager and out of my desire to farm. I held summer jobs far away from the family fields and eventually went away to college, attending summer school instead of returning home to help tend the vegetables.

Perhaps I needed the time away to realize how ingrained farming was to me. My decision to attend graduate school at SFA was encouraged by horticultural mentor, Scott Reeves. He graciously hired me to work summers and Christmases at Treesearch Farms in Houston, owned by the ever-enthusiastic Heidi Sheesley. So after nearly 15 years at SFA, I find myself truly farming again, planning, planting and picking produce, hosting a small farmer's market outside my office, and donating excess to a local food bank. I will admit, my students do the bulk of the work since I am often pulled in three or four directions at any given time. Nevertheless, we are coaxing a small, delicious bounty from the earth at the SFA Gardens as part of our All-American Selections trials.

As participants in this year's

AAS trials, we planted 21 different vegetable entries each against two or three comparison varieties. Needless to say, there are more hot peppers than we know what to do with! We've learned orange beefsteak tomatoes are amazingly delicious; pickling cucumbers require picking almost twice a day; Brussels sprouts are super bitter when grown in the spring; and squash bugs are a horrible, horrible nuisance!



**Bitter gourd, a traditional Asian vegetable, grows in one of the raised beds the adopted by an SFA dietetics student**

Dr. Creech likes to state we're organic, but in reality we're not quite there. Our commitment to sustainable practices continues by using minimal amounts of inorganic fertilizer and pesticide. We've sourced a local fertilizer from composted, pelletized chicken litter from Landscaper's Choice. We

also have adopted a no-till system that allows us to build a healthy soil full of beneficial organisms, fungi and nutrients. We are composting materials from across campus to further build our soil, and encouraging pollinating and predatory insects with special plantings in our insectary. With continued commitment to our sustainable practices, we're diligently moving towards organic!

It's been wonderful to watch our raised bed program evolve. These beds are available to adopt, first for students, then faculty/staff members and the remaining are open to the community. An SFA dietetics major who hails from India is gardening with her family, and they've also recruited a friend from Bangladesh. We have all enjoyed watching their plots evolve with not only familiar vegetables but also vegetables and growing techniques from their native perspective. They're growing red amaranth (yes, a relative of pigweed - which they assure is delicious), gourds, Indian pumpkins and cucumbers, bitter gourds and long beans which are nearly a foot long!

I look forward to the fall and the return of our students who will help tend the garden, expand the insectary, and expand the blueberry and fig collections. Also, the mini market will reopen and donation to Nacogdoches H.O.P.E. will resume.

Stay tuned for future progress and possible winners in our AAS trials! You also can stay in touch with our market through our Facebook page: SFA Sustainable Community Educational Garden.

## A Dozen Summers of Pineywoods Camp

By Kerry Lemon

We certainly have reason to celebrate this summer camp season. Twelve years ago a small group of outdoor enthusiasts came together and dreamed of developing a summer day-camp program for the youth. The hope was to get youth outside, discovering and experiencing the natural world up close and personal. It began with one week of camp for 6-10 year olds. Over time we have changed names, expanded ages, developed new programs, visited different locations, and created a unique T-shirt design for each summer. Every year the ideas have evolved, grown and transformed much like the natural environment our campers explore.

For the past several years the camp has offered four weeks of programming for children ages 4-15. Our youngest campers get their taste of nature right here on the SFA campus where we are fortunate to have many special natural areas available to us. For the past two years our elementary age camp has been located at the SFA Experimental Forest, a wonderful place to learn about East Texas forest habitats. Our 12-15 year olds enjoy a "wilderness adventure" that has taken them to different local natural recreational areas. This year, before heading out for their camping and canoeing trip at Martin Dies Jr. State Park, they were treated to a variety of team building and adventure activities through the Campus Rec Outdoor Pursuits program.

It truly is hard to believe that twelve summers have passed. The truth is in the experience. This year we had on staff one of our original campers who attended the first year



as a toothless six year old. She has been with us as a camper, volunteer counselor-in-training and camp counselor for all twelve years. A recent high school graduate on her way to college in another state, she joined us once again to immerse herself in the wonders of nature. We are happy to say that many of our campers return year after year and then jump on board to help out after they are too old to attend as a camper. We always have numerous first time campers as well, getting their first dose of our version of outdoor adventure. Thanks to donors we are able to offer scholarships to approximately 30% of our campers, providing enriching experiences to anyone who is interested.

In this time, when many people are insulated from the outside world by walls, air-conditioning and electronics, it is worth acknowledging and celebrating a summer tradition that encourages youth to go outside and make personal connections with the plants and animals that share their world.

A dozen summers and hopefully more to come...





## Garden Capital of Texas: a designation

By Dawn Stover

It was a red letter day at the SFA Gardens July 31. It was an honor to provide the setting for the ribbon cutting celebrating the official state designation of Nacogdoches as the Garden Capital of Texas. State Representative Travis Clardy was on hand to make the declaration. We also heard inspiring words from Dr. Baker Pattillo, SFA president, Roger Van Horn, Nacogdoches mayor, Bruce Partain, Nacogdoches Chamber of Commerce president, Angela Wiederhold, Nacogdoches Chamber of Commerce chairman of the board, along with the esteemed Dr. Francis 'Ab' Abernethy. Refreshments were provided by the Nacogdoches Convention and Visitors



Bureau.

It was due to the efforts of Dr. Abernethy, Dianna Walker, Sarah O'Brien and our very own Barb Stump who worked together an A+ proposal congress couldn't refuse. Additionally, Representative

Clardy's belief, support and introduction of the bill in his freshman year in the house earned us this most-fitting designation. Please take a minute to thank these folks when you get a chance. This brand will have far reaching impact on our community and our university.

In the always-lyrical words of Dr. Abernethy, "Natural beauty is encouraged for it's own sake, and for the fact that life among trees and flowers and squirrels and hoot owls is richer and kinder than a trip to Wal-Mart on Saturday morning." No offense to Wal-Mart of course.

## Garden Capital of Texas: a challenge to the community

By David Creech

Here's a news flash. There are a lot of plans, plants and people taking the garden world at our University and in our community to a new level. With the Garden Capital of Texas crown now resting in our fair city, an opportunity presents itself. Let's connect all the gardens, parks and open spaces into a coherent community landscape style. The legislature has made the decree. Now, let's make sure we earn it. If you stand back and take a bird's eye view of this small village in the Pineywoods, it's easy to understand what the Indians and our ancestors were thinking. Two nice creeks, LaNana and Banita, define the bottomland in our valley.

The F.E. Abernethy LaNana Creek Trail is a development with a long and colorful history, one fraught with problems, setbacks, obstacles and disasters. We owe it to Dr. F.E. Abernethy's vision and perseverance that LaNana Creek was cleaned of an amazing amount of trash and debris and the trail constructed. The final product is all about linkage. The Mast Arboretum, Ruby Mize Azalea Garden, and the Pineywoods Native Plant Center rest on the banks of this creek. We like to think of the SFA Gardens as the jewels on the LaNana Creek necklace. With the LaNana Creek Trail a reality, Ab's eyes have now turned to the sister stream,

Banita Creek, and the restoration of the old Mill Pond into a park. I've walked it out. It's a serious challenge. However, Ab has done the legwork with landowners and city managers. A major trail on the east bank of the Banita has been cleaned out. A few bridges along the creek will be added soon. All that's needed is some elbow grease, a few benches, and some trail maintenance. Nacogdoches really will be a Texas superstar for parks, gardens, creeks and trails – all a celebration of our Pineywoods garden heritage. There's no better time to make it happen than now.

## Attracting Birds to the Landscape: some tips

By Greg Grant

1. Provide food, water and shelter. Edges and layers are good. Openings next to woods are great as are different layers in a forested landscape featuring understory, midstory and overstory plants.

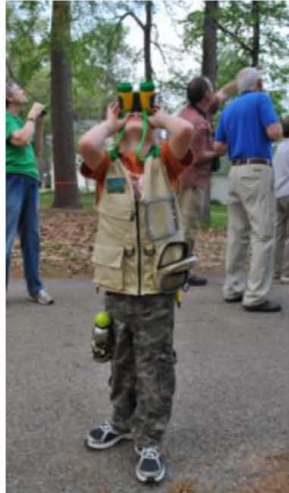
2. Some birds including kestrels, bluebirds and quail prefer open habitat. Others such as brown headed nuthatches, pine warblers and red cockaded woodpeckers need open pine savannahs featuring a herbaceous understory with no midstory.

3. Black Oil Sunflower is the best all-around birdseed that attracts the best range of birds - cardinals, goldfinches, titmice, nuthatches, house finches, chickadees and others. Cheap "wild birdseed" attracts undesirable birds.

4. No-melt suet cakes will attract pine warblers, Carolina wrens, chickadees, titmice, nuthatches and woodpeckers during the winter months.

5. Dead trees (snags) are essential for our eight species of native woodpeckers which are primary cavity dwellers. Their abandoned cavities

provide nesting cavities for a multitude of secondary cavity dwellers including bluebirds, titmice, chickadees, nuthatches, great crested flycatchers, owls, kestrels and wood ducks.



6. Bluebird nest boxes must have 1.5 inch holes, and they must be able to be opened and cleaned and be mounted in open areas before Valentine's Day. Bluebirds eat insects during the summer and berries during the winter. They live year round in East Texas. The boxes should be cleaned out after each nesting attempt.

7. Martin houses should be in wide-open spaces, preferably near a pond or lake as they drink on the fly. Invasive European house sparrows and starlings nesting in martin houses should be destroyed as they compete with martins.

8. Good native plants for birds include hollies, red cedar, Southern magnolia, Carolina snail seed, persimmon, mulberry, Virginia creeper, pokeberry, sumac, blackberries, grapes, sassafras, plums, elderberry, huckleberry, pecan, hackberry, rattan vine, crab apple, wax myrtle, dogwood and coral honeysuckle.

9. Minimize pesticide use. Many birds feed primarily on insects and all baby birds are fed soft bodied insects. Plants attract insects which support native birds. Native birds control the insects as well as spread the seeds to create more plants and attract more insects.

10. The SFA Pinewoods Native Plant Center is a good place to see native woodland birds. Stop by the Tucker House to obtain a list of known species on the property.

### Hip Hip Hooray for Greg Grant!

On June 3 our own bionic research associate at the Pinewoods Native Plant Center had a successful full hip replacement at the Texas Orthopedic Hospital in Houston. After three sleepless, plantless and dogless nights in the hospital, Greg returned home to stay with his parents in Arcadia. His stay was supposed to be two weeks before moving back into his old dogtrot house, where he'd have to master his steps up to the porch. It turns out his big G-90 sweet corn crop lured him and his dogs back to the house after only one week. He feared the corn would turn into a raccoon and crow picnic in their absence! Despite his mother's objections, Greg managed to survive the chores of his old house and farmstead and has now graduated from walker, to cane, to limping around on his own. He's even been spotted on his tractor. He returned back to work Aug. 5 and says he's ready to garden without limping again. He credits his bird watching hobby for keeping him sane during his time off. Stop by the PNPC and pat him on the back (not the backside!).

*Editors note: Yes, Greg wrote this. Not one of the rest of us can take credit for that sense of humor!*





We are presented with a very exciting and special opportunity – the merging of the beautiful SFA Gardens with a national public art exhibition: SFA – Sculpture For All. In spring 2014, as the azalea season is kicking off and the plants are springing to life, imagine a variety of public art pieces nestled among the blooms throughout the gardens. Our goal is to have a juried show of outdoor public art placed in the gardens at SFA, starting in spring 2014 and continuing through spring 2015. With the support of our friends, we hope to make this a yearly endeavor. A \$1,000

stipend will be awarded to each artist for delivery, and prizes will be awarded for Best of Show and People's Choice. Our fundraising goal of \$20,000 will provide for the installation of eight to 10 sculptures, stipends, prizes, insurance, promotions, catalogs and other necessary expenses.

This endeavor will expose SFA students and faculty members to art they might not otherwise see – live and in person. Plus, the event will bring national recognition and publicity to SFA – helping to build brand awareness for the school, as well as aiding in recruiting both students and faculty members. The exhibition will also enhance tourism for the already popular Azalea Trail and Azalea Symposium and be a feather in the hat of Nacogdoches as we celebrate

our first spring as “The Garden Capital of Texas.” With the pairing of Friends of the Arts and Friends of the Gardens, the backing of the entire university and the strength of our community partners, this is assured to be a fruitful and creative project!

**LET'S BLOOM TOGETHER!**  
Play a part in fulfilling Stephen F. Austin State University's mission of commitment to excellence in teaching, research, scholarship, creative work and service by providing access to public art, creating new learning opportunities and increasing the visibility of the university.

**Visit [givetosfa.sfasu.edu](http://givetosfa.sfasu.edu) today! Simply click the Give To SFA icon, select Other and specify SCULPTURE FOR ALL.**

